



Knutson aims for healthy return to Buffs

Junior working out to recover from hip surgery

By Ryan Thorburn

Wednesday, June 24, 2009

BOULDER, Colo. — The weather outside was perfect. The University of Colorado campus was a ghost town.

And there was plenty of parking available at the Coors Events Center; even the coaches' spots were vacant on this particular Friday afternoon in June.

But inside, the bounce of the basketball and the swish of a pure jump shot echoed through the lonely gym.

Levi Knutson is back.

"Real close," the Buffs shooting guard said during a recent interview with the Camera. "Just kind of waiting for the clear from the trainer. I'm in the gym, running, doing agility (drills), all that kind of stuff. I should be back real soon."

Knutson is 20 going on old man. At least that's how it must feel so far during a CU career that has included very similar surgical procedures on both hips -- one after his freshman season in 2008 and one after his sophomore season ended in March.

The 6-foot-4 shooting guard played through the painful hip condition, which included bones grinding on one another and cartilage tearing, in both seasons and has never missed a game in his life.

The injury could explain why Knutson shot 22.9 percent (11-for-48) from behind the arc during CU's miserable 9-22 campaign, but the junior-to-be hates excuses almost as much as losing.

"It will be nice to be healthy, I'll put it that way," Knutson said when asked how much the bad hip hampered his game. "Nothing is really going to change. Every time I'm out there I'm going to give it everything I've got and try to make plays for my teammates and try to win games."

Knutson -- a member of the first team All-Big 12 academic team for the 2008-09 season (he finished the spring semester with 4.0 grade-point average) -- plans to contribute more to the program on the court as an upper classmen if his body cooperates.

Last season he played in 30 games, averaging just 3.8 points and 15.9 minutes.

"There are only two ways to deal with struggling," Knutson said. "And that's to give up or turn it around. I see no quit in our guys and I think it will get turned around."

Jeff Bzdelik recruited Knutson, who led the state in scoring (28.6) during his senior season at Arapahoe High School, when he was at Air Force but lost that battle to CU.

The Buffs' head coach believes Knutson is a great shooter and capable of improving the way Dwight Thorne did last season.

Thorne, now the only senior in the program, shot 40.9 percent (45-for-110) from 3-point distance as a junior after struggling with his shot and injuries as a younger player.

"It was frustrating having to get through the pain," Knutson admits. "I wish I didn't have to have the surgery and had that time to work on my game that much more. Instead, I spent that 10 weeks rehabbing and getting back to full strength. But I have been able to lift and work on my shot. It's not completely lost time. Injuries happen, and the only way you can deal with it is to get healthy and keep getting better."

If nothing else, the competition in practice is going to improve with the addition of a promising five-man recruiting class that includes shooting guard Alec Burks, the reigning Gatorade Player of the Year in Missouri.

"I think we'll be a lot deeper with five new guys coming in, and everybody is going to be competing for playing time, competing for starting spots, and that's how you make each other better," Knutson said.

After finishing up an interview with a reporter, Knutson stepped back onto Sox Walseth Court and went back to working on his game with no one watching.

"Not everybody gets to play Division I basketball and play in the Big 12," he said. "It's once in a lifetime, so it's not hard to get motivated at all."



© 2006 Daily Camera and Boulder Publishing, LLC.